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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, January 23, 2007

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January 23, 2007

Gorcyca: State's covering up

Oakland prosecutor says protests prompt officials to deny Abraham was offered services.

Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- The Oakland County prosecutor accused state officials Monday of launching a cover-up to quell the enormous public outcry over statements that Michigan taxpayers would pay for housing and college tuition for a 21-year-old convicted murderer.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca told The Detroit News that he is baffled that officials with the Department of Human Services continue to deny they offered Nathaniel Abraham state services through a foster care pilot program. Abraham was released from state custody Thursday after serving his eight-year juvenile sentence for killing Ronnie Greene Jr. in 1997. Abraham turned 21 Friday.

"To fabricate a story that he isn't going to get paid services is a misrepresentation of what was actually discussed and offered," Gorcyca said.

Gorcyca points to two pieces of evidence:

A DHS-generated meeting agenda on which Abraham's transition plan is outlined. The document, from a Jan. 8 meeting attended by defense lawyers, DHS workers and Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley, lists all the services Abraham would receive, including education funded by Michigan Rehabilitation Services and housing and food stamp services from the DHS in Bay County, where Abraham lives.

A court transcript from Oakland Circuit Court on Thursday in which Carley publicly discussed -- before a judge and a high-level DHS director -- Abraham's participation in a foster care demonstration program in Wayne County intended for children who are being phased out of the foster care system because of their age.

Judge Eugene A. Moore asked during Abraham's hearing if anyone from DHS wanted to speak, and both representatives present declined.

On Monday, DHS spokeswoman Karen Stock said Abraham was considered for the program, which she says does not yet exist, but the state determined he was ineligible.

Stock was not able to say when that determination was made, or when Abraham's ineligibility was disclosed.

"A (court) hearing would not be a setting where it would be appropriate for a debate. It's true we were investigating this as a possibility, but because the pilot doesn't exist and he wasn't determined eligible, I'm not sure there would have been much point in having a discussion on it," Stock said as to why two DHS workers failed to correct Carley.

State officials first told The News on Thursday that Abraham was only receiving a security deposit and first month's rent from the state.

On Friday, they said a department spokeswoman misspoke and they never committed to services for Abraham.

Gorcyca said Carley called him immediately after the Jan. 8 meeting with a full report of DHS plans and she took copious notes with specifics on the program. He also pointed to comments by defense lawyer Daniel Bagdade, who was at the Jan. 8 meeting, that fully corroborated Carley's version of that meeting.

"DHS is being very disingenuous about what transpired at the meeting and what happened at court," Gorcyca said. "No one corrected Ms. Carley about this program, not before the hearing, not during the hearing, but only after the public outcry has DHS completely backpedaled and attempted to recreate history from their documents."

Gorcyca said he isn't sure what further proof Gov. Jennifer Granholm needs to see that someone in the department is misleading the public. Elizabeth Boyd, the governor's spokeswoman, declined to respond to Gorcyca's comment and referred all inquiries to Stock.

Carley, who spent more than five years on Abraham's case, trying to ensure the young man was being rehabilitated for his second-degree murder conviction, said she is equally dismayed at the tack state officials are taking in the case.

"I wrote down word for word what they said at that meeting. The (judge) gave anybody the opportunity to talk. Why didn't an upper-level manager speak up if this was not the state's intention?" Carley said.

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Article published Jan 23, 2007

Prosecutor: State hid decision to aid young killer

The Associated Press

PONTIAC — A prosecutor says state officials are covering up a decision to offer convicted killer Nathaniel Abraham taxpayer-paid housing and college tuition now that he has been released from state supervision.

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca told The Detroit News for a story today that he is baffled that the state Department of Human Services continues to deny it offered Abraham services through a foster care pilot program.

“To fabricate a story that he isn’t going to get paid services is a misrepresentation of what was actually discussed and offered,” Gorcyca said.

Gorcyca said a Jan. 8 meeting agenda lists services Abraham would receive, including education funded by Michigan Rehabilitation Services and housing. And he noted that Abraham’s participation in a foster care demonstration program was discussed in court on Thursday, when Abraham was released.

On Monday, Human Services spokeswoman Karen Stock said Abraham was considered for the program, but the state determined he was ineligible.

Gorcyca said the state was backpedaling because of negative public response about assistance to Abraham, who turned 21 on Friday. Abraham was 11 when he shot and killed a man outside a Pontiac convenience store in 1997. A jury convicted him two years later of second-degree murder in the shooting.

On Friday, the state denied a statement by Deborah Carley, chief deputy prosecutor in Oakland County, that Abraham was receiving housing and college tuition. The state said confusion might have arisen because some options discussed for Abraham weren’t concrete.

Carley, who spent more than five years on Abraham’s case, said she is dismayed by the response from state officials.

“I wrote down word for word what they said at that meeting,” Carley said.

A judge released Abraham from state supervision on Thursday, more than nine years after he used a rifle to shoot and kill Ronnie Greene, 18. Abraham was held for six years at the maximum-security W.J. Maxey Training School in Livingston County.

Information from: *The Detroit News*, www.detroitnews.com.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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January 23, 2007

Opinion: Let's forgive Abraham and then stand up to prevent violent crime

Ron Stefanski

Ten years have come and gone, and Nathaniel Abraham has grown up. His release from custody last week prompts us to ask questions again.

Is it possible to forgive someone who doesn't express remorse? Are juveniles who are messed up enough to rape or murder ever rehabilitated?

We must remember that forgiveness is the grace we accord the victims left behind. It is a conscious act to preserve our lost loved one's memory and rebuilds our lives. It is not intended for the perpetrator.

What qualifies me to pose these questions is that I had to answer some of them in 1991 after my grandmother, Vicki Stefanski, was murdered in her Detroit home at the hands of a troubled 14-year-old boy.

Whether or not we are ready to forgive gives way to a larger burden we must carry forward. We must never forget Ronnie Green (killed by Abraham), nor Vicki, nor anyone fallen to crime. Faced with raising our own two teenage sons, I understand the questions we need to ask about raising boys in today's turbulent times. Will we be safe returning them to our communities?

I was afraid when Vicki's killer ended up living not far from my home, free and unencumbered. But certainly far more chilling is the prospect of literally thousands of similarly disenfranchised boys roaming our neighborhoods. Many of them are all but lost to us, just waiting for the combustion that occurs when bad timing and ominous opportunity collide.

While Michigan allows some juveniles to be prosecuted as adults for certain crimes, we need to recognize that juvenile criminals are children, perpetuating adult depravities with the limited logic of children.

Whether Abraham's sentence was long enough, whether we were tough enough on him, whether the clothes he wore to court suggest he is reformed or simply primping for the cameras, and whether the community should bear the cost of his care remain unanswered questions that only Abraham will answer for us by what he does next. He is at a crossroads.

There is no vindication in seeing another life lost to violence. What happened to Ronnie Green was tragic, unfair and unforgettable. His family deserves as much care and support as Abraham.

The sad fact is our system failed in its service to them. But this is also separate and distinct from what we are left to do with Abraham.

What kind of a society will we inhabit if we render lifelong judgments out of vengeance and anger, without considering the equally onerous consequences of adding one more casualty to an already untenable equation?

Abraham can prove all the naysayers wrong by getting his life right. He can do this by avoiding the ironic spotlight of celebrity, and accepting the challenges that post-prison life holds for him with resolve and a greater purpose. I join a community of others praying that he does that.

In the meantime, what should we be doing? We must look to Ronnie and Vicki, and not let this stand.

This will not stand if we impose curfews and structure for 9, 10 and 11 year olds and deter an escalation into delinquency; if we are vigilant about every child who falls prey to the allure of drugs; if we fix our schools and make them safe.

This will not stand if we build a bridge to teenagers in libraries, schools and community centers, constructing programs and possibilities for them.

We owe this to those departed, so they won't have died in vain. This leaves us one last word: Enough.

Ron Stefanski is a Metro Detroit freelance writer whose grandmother Vicki was murdered in Detroit by a teenager in 1991. E-mail letters to letters@detnews.com.

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Posted: 1-23-2007

Police: Youth with gun intendent to target 3 teachers

By JOE BOOMGAARD

Daily News Staff Writer

The 14-year-old Ludington boy who brought a loaded revolver to school in his backpack Jan. 15 was planning to use the weapon on three teachers, according to Ludington Police Chief Mark Barnett.

Barnett said the boy was in juvenile court Monday for a hearing similar to a preliminary examination in which the court decided the case against the boy could move forward. He is charged with possessing a dangerous weapon with unlawful intent and carrying a concealed weapon.

"The purpose of bringing the weapon to school was to use the weapon against the teachers," Barnett said.

Barnett said he didn't know if the list was written down, but said the boy had "intended targets."

The boy was remanded to police custody and was placed in a juvenile detention facility in Ottawa County, Barnett said. The boy appeared in Mason County juvenile court with his parents and legal counsel Monday, according to Barnett.

Barnett said the case will progress through juvenile court and noted the investigation into any other possible charges is ongoing.

"Regarding any other direction of the case, we're trying gather all of the truthful facts," Barnett said. "We're trying to get a clear picture of what all took place."

The handgun was discovered after students told a teacher about the weapon, and the teacher informed Assistant O.J. DeJonge Principal Mike Winczewski, who was in a meeting with the student and his mother for an unrelated matter. Winczewski went to the boy's locker and found the handgun in his backpack.

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

Detroit News

Wayne Briefs

Detroit:Hearing delayed in child's death

A preliminary examination set for today is postponed until Feb. 5 for a Detroit woman charged in last summer's death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge. Charlise Adams-Rogers, 59, has hired a new attorney, prompting the delays. He died in a home crowded with adults on Aug. 16, and she faces involuntary manslaughter and second-degree child abuse charges. Lethbridge's death is one of three high-profile deaths in recent months of onetime foster children.



Man, 54, faces hearing in sexual abuse of children

POLICE BLOTTER

ARGENTINE TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

By Elizabeth Shaw

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ARGENTINE TWP. - An Argentine Township man, 54, faces charges of criminal sexual conduct in assaults on five children, ages 4 to 12.

Douglas A. White will face a preliminary examination today before 67th District Court Chief Judge Christopher R. Odette on one count of first-degree CSC and nine counts of second-degree CSC. He was arraigned on the charges Jan. 12.

If convicted, White could be sentenced to up to life in prison, said Sgt. Michele Russ, who has been working on the investigation since it was reported Jan. 10.

- Elizabeth Shaw

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Child porn nets photographer 2 years

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

By Paul Janczewski

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Despite two prior convictions for sex crimes involving minors, and now another for possessing child pornography, a judge told Robert C. Lamb he still doesn't get it.

Genesee Circuit Judge Geoffrey L. Neithercut told Lamb that his actions reveal a pattern, sending him to prison for 2 1/2 years to 6 years.

"Society is bombarded with sexual images that are used to confuse young people," Neithercut said.

He said Lamb's actions, past and present, fostered that.

Lamb, 50, a Grand Blanc Township photographer, was arrested after police found pictures of naked subjects on a computer disk at his home.

In exchange for his guilty plea to one count of possession of child sexually abusive material, prosecutors agreed to drop 21 other child porn charges, which could have netted him 30 years in prison upon conviction.

He also must receive sex offender treatment in prison, Neithercut said.

Lamb spent two years in prison for a 1987 conviction of third-degree criminal sexual conduct. He also was charged with soliciting a minor for immoral purposes in 1980 and placed on a diversion program.

Lamb admitted to having sexually abusive photos of people who he said appeared to be under 18.

"I'm not a predator," Lamb told Neithercut.

Despite an earlier promise to shut down his Web site primarily devoted to boy models, Lamb said it is still up and running.

He said his photography business depends on the site because it is his "only source of income."

Assistant Genesee County Prosecutor Kennan M. Dewitt said Lamb "masqueraded" as a talent scout by telling his teen models that they could be successful if he used their photos on his Web site.

Lamb was not charged in connection with the photos on the Web site. The conviction stems from a photo of himself as a baby but altered to have a large penis.

Lamb's attorney, James F. Piazza, said Lamb exploited no one.

"He was sentenced harsher than what the crime was," he said outside of court.

Neithercut told Lamb he spent more time defending his Web site and career and arguing about what led to

his conviction than showing "remorse ... understanding ... (and the) ... reality (of his actions)."

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ClickOnDetroit.com

MySpace To Distribute Amber Alerts

POSTED: 1:15 am EST January 23, 2007

LOS ANGELES -- The social-networking Web site MySpace.com will now distribute Amber alerts to members notifying them of missing children in their communities.

MySpace, a News Corp. unit, is teaming with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to distribute the alerts, which are triggered by law-enforcement officials.

The online alerts, which will begin Tuesday, will be sent to all users in the ZIP codes where it was issued. They will appear in a small text box at the top of a user's portfolio. The user can click on the box for more information, including a photo of the missing child and a description of the suspect.

The alerts were named for Amber Hagerman, a 9-year-old girl killed in Texas in 1996.

MySpace also announced two safety features designed to protect members' privacy.

The site will now require people signing up for an account to provide a working e-mail address and verify their identity by responding to an e-mail sent to the listed address. This is a practice common with other online services, but MySpace has been hesitant thus far because of fears the confirmation messages might end up mistakenly in spam filters.

The site, open only to those 14 and over, will also offer a tool to prevent any member under age 18 from being contacted by adults, and vice versa. The tool, however, is optional and relies on self-reported ages.

MySpace recently said it was developing software that will allow parents to learn of their child's use of MySpace and be notified of usernames, ages and locations they use in their personal profile pages.

RELATED TO STORY



AP Image

The alerts were named for Amber Hagerman (pictured), a 9-year-old girl killed in Texas in 1996.

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Man in custody after standoff

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

By Nate Reens

The Grand Rapids Press

KENTWOOD -- A tactical team this morning launched an explosive device into the home of a domestic assault suspect, ending a seven-hour standoff that locked down a Southeast Side cul-de-sac.

Kentwood police used a "diversionary" explosion and rushed into the 889 Bergin Farms Court residence of a 58-year-old man who was accused of beating his wife during a 6 p.m. argument, Capt. Randy Williamson said this morning.

Officers were called to the home, near Eastern Avenue and 56th Street SE, after the suspect's wife ran to a neighbor's seeking help from her allegedly abusive husband.

Police met the alleged victim outside of the home and had a short conversation with the man, who was not immediately identified, before he held them at bay while initially threatening suicide.

"As officers tried to approach, he retreated back into the house and barricaded himself inside," Williamson said. "There was the initial verbal contact and then later by phone, but then he cut off communication.

"Several hours went by with no contact."

A swarm of special response team officers circled the one-story ranch-style home for hours, but did not coax him out. About 1 a.m. police shot a small charge inside the house in an effort to distract him.

Police found the man barricaded in his bedroom asleep. He was taken into custody and was not injured, Williamson said. Police were told the man had at least two firearms in the house, but Williamson was unsure if search teams had located the guns.

The man's wife was not seriously injured in the domestic assault, Williamson said. She was in a police car while the situation unfolded through Monday night and into today. Residents of the neighborhood were told to stay in their homes and police blocked traffic to and from the street.

In addition to the accusation of domestic violence, the suspect may have been troubled by medical problems, Williamson said.

Send e-mail to the author: nreens@grpress.com

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Article published Jan 23, 2007

LACASA celebrating 25th anniversary

By Matt Doran

DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

It's been a long time since \$40 was a substantial amount of money, but when a group of volunteers from social services, the prosecutor's office and area churches passed a hat around the room and came up with that sum in the early 1980s, it turned out to be all they needed to get started.

They used that \$40 to start a 24-hour hot line for people suffering from domestic violence. By 1984, they were renting a building to provide housing for victims and had purchased their own building two years later. Nowadays, the organization they founded, LACASA, is one of the best-funded and most visible nonprofits in the county, serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

"This was truly a grass-roots thing," said Bonnie Miller, a Howell attorney who became involved with the organization in 1981 and is currently serving as the board chair. "When you look at how, 25 years later, we've raised \$2.8 million to construct a state-of-the-art facility, it's just an amazing story of the community recognizing a need and filling it."

Now, the organization is wrapping up celebrations of its 25th anniversary with an open house designed to give the community a rare opportunity: a full tour of LACASA's facilities, including the area where clients are sheltered.

Candy Jones-Guerin, marketing and community relations director, said those areas are generally off-limits because of client confidentiality, but the organization has made provisions to house clients elsewhere during the open house so the public can get a look at what donations actually fund. Right now, less than a tenth of the building is open to the public, but Jones-Guerin said if people see where victims are housed, they may be more comfortable recommending the organization to those who need shelter.

"It's nice to be able to make a donation to LACASA but then be able to come here and see where that money's going," she said.

Miller said wasn't there when the hat was passed to raise \$40, but she was asked shortly thereafter to open her home to victims needing housing. She was single at the time and lived in Fowlerville and said she housed victims until 1984, when the organization started renting housing.

"I had a little extra space and we would house people for three or four days to get them out of the situation," she said.

Bonnie Detweiler said she and her husband Robert Detweiler similarly opened their homes to victims during that period and said rearranging her life to provide shelter was hard work.

"We'd get calls in the middle of the night," she said. "That's when this stuff usually happens. People would come and stay with us a day or two, until they could find a place for them to go and stay that was safe."

Bonnie Detweiler said she was glad to help because it takes a lot of help for a victim to get out of an abusive situation.

"It was very fulfilling to know you could help someone that way," she said. "They needed to get out of a bad situation, and we could be there to give them a quiet roof over their heads that was safe. It was something we could do, so we thought we should do it."

Miller remembered LACASA's first office, which was a desk and a phone line in the social services office. When the organization started renting an office in an old building in Brighton, she remembered showing up to paint the walls and make the office usable.

In 1984, the organization put together enough funding to rent a shelter in the Howell area, which it equipped with household goods such as sheets and silverware through community donations.

"That was a tremendous day," Miller said. "It's an organization that actually does something. This group gets stuff done."

Nowadays, the organization has nearly 30 employees and a 13,000-square-foot facility with a shelter, children's area, administrative center and counseling center. The shelter can house up to 23 individuals at once.

"It's really had some pretty huge jumps," Jones-Guerin said. "I think that a lot of people are touched by the issues that we work with here."

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Matt Doran at (517) 548-7095 or at mdoran@gannett.com.

Setting the bar high



News Photo by Amy Lisenbe

Robin DiMarzo and her daughter Rebekah, 3, read a book together at the Alpena County Public Library Monday evening. New standards passed by the State Board of Education can inform professional care givers, teachers and parents about setting and care giver characteristics that support children's development - part of a framework that supports high quality child care setting and support development and learning in the infant and toddler age range.

By PATTY RAMUS

Since the establishment of Michigan's early childhood standards before the 1990s, the state has defined standards for infants and toddlers for the first time.

On Dec. 12, the Michigan Board of Education passed the Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler Programs document. The document sets the bar for quality infant and toddler programs, said Robin Benson, director of Child and Family Services of Northeast Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care.

"It does not replace minimum legal standards that are in place by state licensing," she said. "Instead, they describe children's development and the environment, including setting and caregiver characteristics that support children's development."

According to Lindy Buch, director of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services, Michigan was one of the few states to set early childhood standards prior to the late 1990s with the approval of standards set in 1986 for four-year-olds. In 1992, standards for preschool children's learning was approved.

"The Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Infant and Toddler programs align with the 2005 Early Childhood Standards of Quality for Pre-kindergarten," she said. "The state board of education sets these high quality standards for programs and expectations for children's learning as a part of the infrastructure and framework for improvement of programs with serving young children."

Buch said the board of education had a task force about early childhood and early literacy. The task force requested the Department of Education to review and renew the 1986 and 1992 standards. The Head Start-State Collaboration Office, the Department of Human Services Child Development and Care Divisions and the Department of Community health all participated in funding the initiative.

"The pre-kindergarten and infant/toddler documents respond to this request," she said.

The standards will not affect current licensing requirements for child care providers. The standards of quality are guidelines for high quality practice, Buch said.

"There are currently not any infant and toddler programs where the standards are required but

several preschool programs, including the Michigan School Readiness Program are required to use the pre-kindergarten standards," she said.

Benson said the document describes five strands which build a framework for supporting high quality child care setting and support development and learning in the infant and toddler age range.

"This set of standards is not intended to be a checklist of milestones for care givers to use to evaluate children," she said.

The first section of the document lists a strand and the goals associated with it for infants and toddlers. Early knowledge, skills and attitudes infants and toddlers begin to develop and examples of experiences and strategies along with questions for adult reflection are described, Benson said.

"Work on early childhood in New Zealand greatly influenced this part of the document," Buch said.

The second section of the document describes what an infant and toddler program looks like and what a quality program does, Benson said.

The standards are important because the first three years of a child's life are crucial developmentally, Benson said.

The standards can inform professional development for caregivers, teachers and parents of young children, Buch said.

The entire document can be accessed in a PDF document on the Michigan Department of Education Web site at **www.michigan.gov/mde**.

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Michigan Report

January 22, 2007

WELFARE CASELOADS BACK UP IN DECEMBER

After a brief dip in November, families receiving cash assistance from the state were back up in December, according to reports from the Department of Human Services.

The Family Independence Program had 88,795 cases in December, up from 87,197 cases in November and topping the recent high of 88,133 cases in October. The cases represented 240,659 people, up from 236,137 people in November.

The Food Assistance Program showed a 15th straight month on increase, with 550,235 households representing 1.196 million people. November had 545,158 cases representing 1.19 million people.

Childcare cases also climbed again in December to 61,078 cases representing 115,577 children. In November there were 60,626 cases representing 114,494 children.

The number of people required to work reporting income held dropped to 29 percent, a recent low. The percent of cases exceeding the federal 60-month limit continued to hold at 10 percent.

01/22/2007

Free tax services offered at two county locations

The Tri-County Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition (EITCC), serving Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties, will have several locations in Van Buren County in which it will offer to area residents free help in preparing basic, federal and state income tax returns.

The tax service is done by trained volunteers connected with EITCC.

In Paw Paw, the Michigan Works building, located at 32849 Red Arrow Highway, will serve as a site on Wednesdays, from 3 to 7 p.m., Feb. 7 and March 14 and 28.

In Lawrence, the Van Buren Intermediate School District Technology Center, 250 South St., will host a kick-off event Feb. 1, from 3 to 7 p.m., and will run Monday through Friday, Feb. 5 through April 13, by appointment, 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Saturday hours are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Feb. 3 and 17; March 3, 17, and 31, and April 14.

Volunteers will be able to assist area residents in claiming all credits and refunds in which they are entitled, such as Home Heating Credit, Child Care Credit, Homestead Property Tax Credit, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

The volunteers will also be able to electronically file taxes, with refunds anticipated back in two weeks.

For appointments and information, call (269) 674-8091.



Let's not forget war on poverty

January 23, 2007

BY DESIREE COOPER

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Earlier this month, an estimated 5,000 demonstrators marched in New Orleans, calling attention to nine homicides in the first 10 days of the new year. Mayor Ray Nagin has offered a plan to address the crime wave by putting more cops on the streets, but that's too late for Detroiters Thomas Rogan, 28, who was killed there in October.

"We saw Tommy for two weeks at a family reunion in July," said his mother, Helen Hill. "It felt like God was saying to us, 'Enjoy him, he'll be with me soon.' "

At the reunion, Rogan told his family that he was leaving Detroit for New Orleans, where he'd landed a job as a security officer for \$15 an hour -- a wage he'd been unable to command at home.

"I got him a ticket on the Internet, gave him some money and my blessings," Hill said. "He'd only been there three months before he was killed."

On Oct. 28, Rogan was moonlighting as a security guard at a nightclub, Passions, when police say convicted felon Terrell Dowl, 29, opened fire with an assault weapon, killing Rogan and injuring a woman. Dowl ran to another club, where he was felled by another security officer.

Last year, there 161 homicides in New Orleans.

Hill said it took a week for her to reclaim her son's body "because they were still dealing with bodies from Hurricane Katrina," which hit in August 2005.

"He had bought a car and was sending money home for me to put up for him, like servicemen used to do in my day," Hill said.

Fighting for opportunity

In a way, Rogan was serving on the battlefield, but this time, it was in the war on poverty.

"He talked about the devastation," Hill said. "He described the markings he saw on the houses designating how many bodies had been found inside."

Drake Phiher, 38, runs the Detroit concert promotion company Urban Organic. He also followed economic opportunity to the disaster-ridden gulf coast following Hurricane Rita in September 2005. He worked for FEMA in Houston, then ended up in New Orleans in November 2005.

"It was a very dangerous place, full of abject poverty," he said.

Phiher said that he was one of many Detroiters looking for work there, but he and Rogan never met.

"I came back in January 2006," he said. "I decided enough is enough. The experience taught me how devastated urban areas are around the country. There might be a small variance in the statistics from city to city, but there's really no variance in the plight."

A war that should be fought

Hill is haunted by the ultimate price her son paid for finding decent work. The nightclub job

had been offered to Rogan by his full-time employer, a construction company. "He risked a lot to try to be a man, to make a living and go on with his life," she said.

If we're about to invest billions in securing embattled cities, maybe they ought to be our own. It's time for a surge to happen on American shores, and for us to finish the job we started in New Orleans.

Maybe then, the investment can spread to other cities and we can bring our loved ones home.

Contact **DESIREE COOPER** at 313-222-6625 or dcooper@freepress.com.

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Bean: Here Are Your Options

MIRS, January 22, 2007

House Fiscal Agency Chief Mitch **BEAN** bluntly laid out today during an unusual presentation to the full House what options lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** have in dealing with a budget hole in the current fiscal year that is swelling to \$1 billion.

While sticking to the mantra of good legislative fiscal advisors, Bean told the members they can cut spending. They can raise revenue. The choice was theirs, but the presentation was aimed at helping them understand the consequences of the various options they had before them.

On the spending side, the HFA chief showed the members a pyramid that revealed how little of the state's budget is discretionary, General Fund spending.

The presentation also looked at some basic facts about the structure of the state budget, such as:

- Of the state's adjusted gross budget (\$41.6 billion), 31.3 percent or \$13 billion goes to schools; 38.3 percent or \$15.9 billion is restricted (66 percent of that is specified federal spending); \$9.2 billion is General Fund, and \$3.4 billion is dedicated Transportation spending.

- In FY 2007 appropriations, education (including community colleges, higher ed) comprised 21.2 percent of spending. Human Services comprised 65 percent.

"To put this into perspective, eliminating the Executive Office, the Legislature, and the departments of State, Treasury, Management and Budget, Attorney General, Auditor General, Civil Rights, and Civil Service would save less than \$300 million," Bean said.

That means for cuts in discretionary spending, lawmakers would have to look at the human services section of the budget — specifically, Community Health, Human Services and Corrections. But, he warned, cuts in most of these areas have consequences.

"Almost 25 percent of GF/GP revenue is appropriated for Medicaid," Bean said of Community Health, noting that one of seven state residents are eligible for the program. "An important thing to understand about Medicaid is that every \$1 spent by the state is matched by approximately \$1.27 from the federal government — so a \$1 state cut in Medicaid is

actually a \$2.27 cut."

The presentation goes on to cite a Michigan State University (MSU) study that noted a \$100 million state cut to Medicaid would represent about \$180 million in lost income for state residents.

Of the optional services in Medicaid, the largest is optional prescription drug coverage at a cost of \$258 million. Other non-mandatory services go to seniors or younger disabled adults. Bean also noted there are other non-Medicaid services that could be cut, including Community Mental Health (CMH) at about \$300 million.

"Members should be aware that the state has an additional \$400 million from the feds for the proposed Michigan First Health Care plan, so a cut could cost a great deal of federal funding," he warned.

Within Human Services, the matching dollar scenario also comes into play. Bean noted that \$465 million in General Fund money is used draw down \$775 million in federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.

Much of the remaining \$630 million in General Fund money used in Human Services is used to draw down federal matching funds. In effect, a \$1 cut actually means a \$2.40 cut. Some \$100 million in the General Fund that isn't used for the match, but \$50 million is used for the Jobs Education Training program to help the state meet federal work requirements. The state risks \$100 million in fines for not meeting those requirements.

The Department of Corrections was also looked at, but Bean warned that cuts in discretionary programs such as academics could result in a rise in longer-term costs. For example, prisoners without a GED generally aren't granted parole — thereby raising long-term prisoner housing costs.

On the total size of the problem the lawmakers are facing, Bean noted that in addition to the \$722.8 million in current fiscal year revenue shortfalls identified last week at the Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference, there are some \$240 to \$280 million in spending pressures.

Those spending pressures include:

- Unrealized savings from Medicaid budget adjustments, \$100 million
- Non-realized tobacco settlement payments, \$84.6 million
- A higher Human Services Caseload, \$20 to \$40 million

- Lower than anticipated DHS Jobs, Education and Training (JET) savings, \$10 to \$20 million

- Increased prison population and increased prison health care costs, \$25 to \$35 million

Combined with spending pressures, the total problem for the current year budget reaches \$962 million to \$1 billion. Then Bean went on to enumerate about \$682 million in known spending pressures that will come to bear on the budget in the coming FY 2008).

Bean's presentation also hit on the historic trends within the state's General Fund budget.

"The trend of (General Fund) revenue is expected to continue," he said. "In nominal terms, revenue is lower than it was in 1997. When adjusted for inflation, it is below 1973 levels. Since 2000, (the General Fund) has been in a state of structural deficit as the state continued to use one-time sources to keep expenditures higher than otherwise would have been possible—but the state's options to continue this practice are becoming more limited."

In addition to hitting on the state's bleak budget picture (both spending and revenue). The Fiscal Agency Director also apprised members of projections that the state's roads are expected to rapidly deteriorate over the next two fiscal years due to no expected increase in federal funding and a lagging fuel tax which last experienced growth (+0.6) percent in 2001-2002 and has declined ever since.

On the size of state government, Bean noted that between 2001 and 2006, the number of state employees (all departments) has decreased by 15.9 percent. That figure climbs to 18.3 percent if one were to remove the Department of Corrections from the mix.

DeRoche: 'It Happened On Her Watch'

MIRS, January 22, 2007

Today, House Minority Leader Craig **DeROCHE** (R-Nov) told reporters that the blame for the state's budget deficit belongs on Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**'s shoulders.

"The Governor's decisions, made over the past four years, accounts for more than \$700 million in costs to the state," DeRoche said. "Some of it was from failure to implement what we voted to implement. Others were just things decided to do, such as the 10 percent state employee pay raises."

DeRoche argued that \$400 million of the deficit comes from pay increases for state employees. He also said ordinary citizens of Michigan have a right to question the latest numbers coming out now on the School Aid Fund, considering that previous numbers from last year had been different.

"Michigan's government is fine with the \$40 billion-plus it gets," DeRoche said. "Before we do the budget I think we need to get some more specific numbers. I think we should do that before the average businesses and families in the state have to take a gut shot."

The "gut shot" DeRoche was alluding to was apparently a prediction on his part that Granholm is going to propose some kind of tax increase.

The various costs that DeRoche laid on Granholm's doorstep was presented piecemeal, and largely in response to individual reporter questions, during an impromptu news conference in the Thatcher Room behind the House chamber.

One of the items DeRoche suggested was that the state could pick up an additional \$122 million by suspending the 21st Century Jobs Fund. (\$76 million for the current program and \$46 million in debt retirement.)

Recall, some factions within the Republican Party were highly critical of DeRoche buying into the 21st Century Jobs Fund to begin with. Today, he said the funding mechanism for the program (which comes from tobacco settlement dollars) was approved by House Republicans before they knew about the current revenue shortfall and a tobacco settlement lawsuit that is costing the state additional money.

DeRoche also cited \$100 million that he says could have been saved from

the Department of Community Health (DCH) if Granholm had gone along with House-proposed changes.

MIRS asked DeRoche if his caucus was going to present a list of budget cuts it wants to see enacted. His response was that such a list isn't ready as of today, but he indicated it would eventually be forthcoming.

DeRoche also commented on possible Department of Corrections budget saving measures.

"Maybe if we let out more parolees they can run for the Legislature," DeRoche said, taking a rhetorical swing at House Democrats and one of its members, Rep. Bert **JOHNSON** (D-Detroit), who has a felony conviction on his record.

Meanwhile, the impromptu news conference included a debate of sorts between House Fiscal Agency (HFA) Director Mitch **BEAN** and Rep. Bruce **CASWELL** (R-Hillsdale). Caswell argued that there shouldn't be a budget problem with Medicaid in the 2008 budget cycle because the federal government was giving the state an additional \$165 million for the program.

Bean responded that the current budget estimates include that same scenario and still have Medicaid falling \$189 million short.

An obviously skeptical Caswell commented that if that was the case, the state would be spending \$400 million on Medicaid and still falling nearly \$200 million short, a fact that would indicate there was something seriously wrong with how the state was running the program.

Bean responded that he could not comment on a policy statement of that nature.